



The President's Daily Brief

31 July 1969

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

I. MAJOR PROBLEMS

VIETNAM

In the private meeting in Paris on Tuesday between Mr. Habib and Ha Van Lau, the Communists agreed to continue these sessions in the hope that they would be "free, easy, and open"--presumably without the constraints of higher level, more formal contacts. Lau's main interest was in finding out our minimum conditions for troop withdrawals, how many troops we are prepared to take out and when, and some additional US views on a political settlement.

Ha Van Lau struck a familiar pose on mutual withdrawals. In response to Habib's probing about withdrawals of North Vietnamese troops, Lau insisted that the US rephrase its position so as to give no suggestion of a reciprocal obligation by Hanoi. This is the same technique that Hanoi used on the bombing issue a year ago when the Communists refused to recognize the principle of reciprocity, but implied they would be prepared to respond positively if the US acted on the assumption of Communist good faith. Presumably they intend to let their military activity speak for itself in the hope that this will satisfy US demands and prompt both additional US troop withdrawals and a cutback in allied military activity in South Vietnam.

The Communists may even be engaged in the same public relations game they tried a year ago. During a slowdown in military action in South Vietnam last summer, Xuan Thuy implied to some newsmen that the lull was a response to US demands for reciprocity for a bombing halt. In an interview

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with Newsday on 30 July, the PRG's Madame Binh offered a similar interpretation of the current battlefield lull. She told the correspondent that the Communists are "acting so that American troops will be withdrawn and unnecessary American deaths avoided."

MIDDLE EAST

Fighting generally subsided this week, but some brief actions in Syria and along the Suez Canal resulted in casualties for both sides. Syrian aircraft and artillery struck at Israeli positions in the Golan Heights - Mount Hermon area yesterday in retaliation for Israel's air strike on 30 July at fedayeen bases in the area.

In its first two meetings, the recently formed Jordanian National Security Council adopted a number of decrees designed to limit fedayeen activities.

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Despite these additional signs that Husayn intends to press forward with his scheme to bring the fedayeen into line, we question how far he will be able to go. On several occasions in the past, he has worked up his courage to move against the fedayeen only to back off at the last moment.

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SOVIET AFFAIRS

It is now apparent that some Warsaw Pact states have joined the USSR in the large-scale air exercise in Eastern Europe. On 31 July, about 160 Soviet medium bombers flew over Eastern Europe and drew reaction from about 110 interceptor aircraft--including some Polish and Czechoslovak fighters. There is still no indication that ground forces will participate, but Soviet transport flights continued on both 30 and 31 July. About 80 aircraft from the USSR entered Poland and East Germany. Most of the tactical aircraft, noted in the first phase of the exercise last week, have returned to their home bases.

II. OTHER IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENTS

There is nothing significant to report.

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